This will be brief, since the purpose and main assumptions of this book have proved broad enough to require elaboration in an introductory chapter. Here I would stress one point: in this book I have tried simply to study the affinities in form and matter between the versified translations of the Psalms and George Herbert’s lyrics. I have not attempted to write a formal history of a genre in English poetry, much less an account of its influence. My reading of Herbert does recognize the historical dimension of his poems; but I have not made that dimension the only significant one in the determination of poetic meaning or poetic value.

In reading Herbert’s poetry by way of the metrical psalms that precede it, one has to undertake the trip through Chaos itself, the rise of an English meter, the “new” poetry, the poetry of discords concors and the poetry of formal meditation. Intelligent specialized studies appear on these topics each year; thanks to them I realize (now even more fully than when I began thinking about the subject) the nature of the risks my argument is running. There are, therefore, certain aspects of the subject that I have not treated at all, for example, the common musical elements of The Temple and the Psalms, or the thematic interconnections between The Temple and the Book of Common Prayer and the different texts of the Psalms, or the varied linguistic properties of stanza forms. In electing not to treat these and related subjects, I have made a tacit bargain with the reader; for I have not attempted to force all the poems of The Temple into my
thesis, nor have I claimed that I have here the best and only reading of Herbert, the critical equivalent of Volpone's oglio del Scoto. The reading I propose, however, could be applied to more poems than are discussed here; rather than multiply examples needlessly, it seemed better in this space to stress a few central poems as models or representatives.

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E. B. Juel-Jensen for permission to quote from his text of the Countess of Pembroke's poem "To the Angell Spirit of Sir Philip Sidney."

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